

GERALDINE ELLIS WATSON

(8 FEB 1925–6 APR 2012)

Barney L. Lipscomb

Botanical Research Institute of Texas
1700 University Dr.
Fort Worth, Texas 76107-3400, U.S.A.
barney@brit.org

George M. Diggs, Jr.

Department of Biology, 900 N. Grand Ave.
Sherman, Texas 75090, U.S.A. and
Botanical Research Institute of Texas
gdiggs@austincollege.edu

Geraldine Ellis Watson (Fig. 1), artist, botanist, writer, conservationist, colleague, friend, and one of the individuals responsible for creation of the Big Thicket National Preserve, died on 6 April 2012. She was born February 8, 1925 in Bon Ami, Louisiana to Herbert Guy Ellis and Retha Goznell Ellis (Houston Chronicle 2012). She lived near Silsbee and maintained the Watson Pinelands Preserve (Tyler Co.), dedicated to preserving a portion of the diversity of the Big Thicket. She is survived by four children, Marvin E. Watson, Bobby L. Watson, Retha Regina Watson, Maria Eden Williams, four grandchildren, and six great grand children.

Watson devoted much of her life to protecting the Big Thicket. Her efforts included identifying and collecting plants for the University of Texas at Austin and the National Park Service, her many publications (e.g., Watson 1975, 1979, 1982, 2003, 2006), her political involvement with the Big Thicket Association for the creation of a federal preserve, her input in establishing the most appropriate boundaries for the new federal preserve, and her work restoring a portion of the Thicket on the Watson Pinelands Preserve near Warren (Diggs, Lipscomb, Reed, & O'Kennon 2006; Dembling 2012).

I (B.L.L.) met Geraldine in the early 1980s after the establishment of the Big Thicket National Preserve in 1974 with my colleague Wm. F. (Bill) Mahler. Bill and I (during our SMU days) visited and botanized with Geraldine on a number of field trips. Later (2000–2006), while working on the *Illustrated Flora of East Texas*, my colleague George and I enjoyed visits with Geraldine at her Watson Pinelands Preserve on a number of occasions. Geraldine cooperated with us and assisted us in a number of ways in our work on the East Texas flora. She painted the frontispiece to the introduction of the *Illustrated Flora of East Texas, Volume 1*, allowed access to the Watson Pinelands Preserve, and contributed a variety of information on the Big Thicket. Our last visit (2005) with Geraldine was memorable with reminiscing conversation and good tea in her home on the Preserve. After tea and a visit, Geraldine proudly walked around the Preserve pointing out to us her favorite plants and telling stories. It was easy to see and understand why Geraldine loved the Big Thicket. Gracious as always, Geraldine was thrilled to receive a copy of the *Illustrated Flora of East Texas, Volume 1* at a book signing event at Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches (Fig. 2).

For more information about Geraldine and to see two of her paintings (*Alophia drummondii*, p. 267; *Cypripedium kentuckiense*, p. 320), see pp. 194–196, 264–267, and 320 in Diggs, Lipscomb, Reed, & O'Kennon 2006). See online at www.brit.org/sites/default/files/public/BRIT%20Press/IFNCT_Docs/SBM_26_pp1_272.pdf and www.brit.org/sites/default/files/public/BRIT%20Press/IFNCT_Docs/SBM_26-pp309-1151.pdf.

A video interview of Geraldine (from 1999) can be found on-line at the Texas Legacy Project (2009b) and a transcript of the interview can be seen at the Texas Legacy Project (2009a). She was one of 62 pivotal Texas conservationists chosen to be included in the book, *The Texas Legacy Project: Stories of Courage and Conservation* (Todd & Weisman 2010). For an article about Geraldine published just before her death, see Kabele (2012).

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FIG. 1. Geraldine Watson. A photo of a younger Geraldine and one in particular that she liked. *Illustrated Flora of East Texas, Volume 1*, Fig. 113, p. 194 (Diggs, Lipscomb, Reed, & O'Kennon 2006).



FIG. 2. Geraldine Watson with Barney Lipscomb at Stephen F. Austin State University, 30 Mar 2007. Photo taken at a book signing for the *Illustrated Flora of East Texas, Volume 1*.

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